

Ozifying Spices. A brief look at a selection of spices at the multiculinary Australian table prior to 1900.

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Recently I have been writing about South Asian cuisines at the multiculinary Australian table. Spices are a key element in them, giving dishes their characteristic flavour. I felt it was time to explore their place at the Australian table.

Where to start? Jacqui Newling in *Eat Your History* gives a list of spices commonly used in colonial Australia: 'Old World Classics such as caraway, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, and mace (also from the nutmeg tree), mustard and black pepper and white pepper, and New World allspice (Jamaican pepper or pimento), and cayenne (chilli) powder). Other more 'exotic' or less frequently used spices, such as cardamom, cumin and turmeric, could be purchased from speciality import merchants and chemists.¹

Using that as a checklist, I looked for the earliest published mention of a particular spice and an early recipe for it. The primary source was *Trove* the digital depository of newspaper, magazines, and journals managed by the National Library of Australia. I searched by proxy Edmund Mason's 1843 *The Housewife's Guide ; or an Economical and Domestic Art Of Cookery, containing Directions for Marketing, Instructions for Dressing Butchers' Meat, Poultry, Game, Fish, Vegetables, &c ; likewise for Preparing Soups, Broths, Gravies, and Sauces; also the Art of Potting, Collaring, Pickling, Preserving, and Making Wines : to which is added the different Branches. of Modern. Pastry and; Confectionery, &c. &c. &c.*^{2 3} I also searched in Edward Abbott's 1864 *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well As The "Upper Ten Thousand"* the earliest extant Australian cookery book.

The spice notes at the top of each entry are condensed from Ian Hemphill's *Spice Notes*.⁴

I have only given here the culinary use of the spice. Some were also used in medicinal concoctions.

Allspice

Allspice (*Pimenta diacia*) is the dried fruit of a tree native to Jamaica. The dried berry is dark reddish brown in colour. Allspice powder has aromas of clove, cinnamon, and nutmeg. It's an ingredient in cakes and biscuits and is one of the ingredients in mixed spice.

¹ Newling, Jacqui *Eat Your History. Stories & Recipes From Australian Kitchens*, Sydney Living Museums, The Mint, and NewSouth Publishing 2015 p.202

² Mason, Edmund, *The Housewife's Guide ; or an Economical and Domestic Art Of Cookery, containing Directions for Marketing, Instructions for Dressing Butchers' Meat, Poultry, Game, Fish, Vegetables, &c ; likewise for Preparing Soups, Broths, Gravies, and Sauces; also the Art of Potting, Collaring, Pickling, Preserving, and Making Wines : to which is added the different Branches. of Modern. Pastry and; Confectionery, &c. &c. &c.* 1843

³ I say by proxy as there is only an advertisement for its first publication giving headings for the content. However, Mason's book was a localised revised printing of Deborah Irwin's British original of the same name. The content of the two books is the same except in a few instances. So I have taken the liberty of ascribing to Mason Irwin's recipes.

⁴ Hemphill, Ian, *Spice Notes*, Macmillan 2000

The earliest reference for using allspice is in 1803 in an advertisement listing the items Ann Grant has for sale:

...Tea ,Sugar, and Molasses, Rice, Butter and Allspice ...⁵

An early recipe using allspice was this in 1830 for Curing Meat⁶:

A gentleman in the interior has favoured us with a mode of curing meat without the use of casks, which he has proved, by ample experience, to be most excellent, producing an article of superior quality and flavour. For 50 or 60lbs. of beef, take 9lbs. of common salt, $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. of saltpetre, 2lbs. of sugar, 2oz. of cloves, and 2oz. of all-spice, both ground ; rub the beef (or mutton hams) ; put it into a tub ; rub again on the third day ; turn and rub for ten days ; then take the meat out, and smoke it with straw. Meat thus preserved may be kept in cases, and is as sure as ham.

Cardamom

The green cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*) are seeds with a papery bark around them. It's a multifunctional spice flavouring Danish pastries and fruit dishes, South Asian curries, and an enhancement to coffee in the Middle East.

The earliest reference I came across for cardamom was an 1825 advertisement for goods being sold by J. Tawell Apothecary

... Barbery, cardamom, raspberry and mixed sugared and burnt almonds...⁷

An early recipe using cardamom I found was this one from 1873 for Mutton or Beef Palao:⁸

Take 2 lb. of good beef or of mutton, or lamb, cut up as for curry, make a good strong gravy, stew the meat in about a pint of water or stock, season with some onions and salt, when cooked take it off the fire ; cut up two onions lengthways into slices, warm your stewpan, melt in it 4oz. butter, lard, or good dripping ; as it bubbles fry the sliced onions brown, remove the onions, and put in half a pound of Patna rice that has been well washed and drained, fry it, as the water absorbs the butter, etc., throw in three cloves, four cardamoms a little cinnamon, a blade or two of mace, a few allspice, and one teaspoonful of salt ; mix well together and add the gravy in which the meat was stewed, or as much of it as will cover the rice, cover the stewpan closely, and place it over a slow fire ; as the gravy is absorbed, reduce the heat ; stir occasionally, and shake the stewpan to prevent the palao turning, when the rice is tender warm the meat ; place in centre of dish, cover with the rice, strew over the fried onions, and garnish with two hard boiled eggs cut in rings; a few slices of bacon, fried crisp and rolled, may also be put round the rice.

Caraway

Caraway (*Carum carvi*) is a seed with the flavour profile of fennel and anise, and orange-peel . It complements apple, pork sausages and cabbage and is used in making harissa.

⁵ Now On Sale At the House of Ann Grant, Classified Advertisement, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 21 August p.4

⁶ Curing Meat, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 7 August 1830 p.2

⁷ J. Tawell, *The Australian* 27 October 1825 p.1

⁸ Mutton or Beef Palao, Indian Curries, *Weekly Times* 24 May 1873 p.3

The earliest mention of carraway is in 1821 in an advertisement for goods for sale at J. Tawell, Apothecary:

... English caraway and coriander seeds ...⁹

The earliest recipe using caraway I found was this from 1864 for *Caraway Biscuits*;¹⁰

To three pounds of flour add two ounces of butter, rubbed into the flour, half a pound of sugar, one ounce of carraway seeds, half an ounce of carraway seeds, half an ounce of ground coriander seed, half a tea-spoon of carbonate of soda, and a table-spoonful of arrowroot; mix the whole together and make a stiff paste with warm milk, cut into thin cakes, prick with a fork, and bake.

Cayenne

Cayenne pepper is a blend of chilli powders, for an orange to red coloured powder with mild heat.

The earliest mention of cayenne I found was in 1822 in the advertisement for Mr R. Reiby, importer:

... olives, Cayenne pepper, mustard ...¹¹

The earliest recipe I found in which cayenne was used is this 1835 *Warren Hastings Receipt for Curry*;¹²

Take a quarter of a pound of butter and fry the heart of a hard white cabbage and two large onions, sliced with an apple or any other acid fruit, then put them into a stewpan with a teaspoonful of good cayenne pepper, one of ground black pepper, and one of salt, a table-spoonful of turmeric, the juice of half a lemon, and a little good gravy ; then put in the fowl or meat, after it is cut up and fried and let it simmer over a gentle fire for three hours.

Chillie

Chillie (*Capsicum annum*) is a generic term for hundreds of varieties of a plant bearing seeds of varying colour and heat. Capsaicin is the heat chemical that can take the chilli from mild green capsicum to scorching hot varieties like Birds Eye.

The first reference for chillie I found was this 1806 advertisement for J. Harris:¹³

... 1 bale of chillies ...

⁹ J. Tawell Apothecary, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 5 May 1821 p.1

¹⁰ Caraway Biscuits, Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the "Upper Ten Thousand"*, Sampson, Low, Son & Marston London 1864 p.56

¹¹ *Hobart Town Gazette and Van Diemen's Land Advertiser*. 2 February 1822 p.1

¹² Warren Hastings Receipt for Curry, *The Sydney Herald*, 27 August 1835 p.3

¹³ J. Harris, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 30 November p.1

An early recipe using chilli was this in 1864 for Chutney:¹⁴

English Chutney

A very near imitation of the Indian may be made from two pounds apples peeled, cored, and pounded; a quarter of a pound of green mint chopped fine, the juice of two lemons, half a pound of bird's chillies, half a pound of salt, a quarter of a pound of onions, and the same of garlic, with a small quantity of vinegar. If you cannot procure the green chillies use cayenne.

Cinnamon

Cinnamon (*Cinnamom zeylanicum*) is the bark of a tree endemic to Sri Lanka. It is used to flavour everything from cakes to curries. It has a mildly sweet taste. It is an ingredient in the Indian spice garam masala.

The earliest reference I found for cinnamon was in 1807 for Charles Thompson:¹⁵

... cloves, cinnamon, rice...

An early recipe using cinnamon was this 1836 recipe for Mead:¹⁶

But the finest mead is that made of what they call live honey, which is what naturally runs from the combs (but that from swarms of the same year is the best) and add so much honey to clear spring water, as that when the honey is dissolved thoroughly, an egg will not sink to the bottom, but easily swim up and down in it. Boil this liquor in a copper vessel for about an hour or more, and by that time the egg will swim above the liquor about the breadth of a groat, then let it cool ; the next morning you may barrel it up, adding to the proportion of fifteen gallons an ounce of ginger, half an ounce of cinnamon, cloves and mace, of each an ounce, all grossly beaten, for if you beat them fine they will always float in your mead, and make it foul ; and if you put them in whilst it is hot, the spices will lose their spirits. You may also add a spoonful of yeast at the bung-hole to increase its fermentation ; but let it not stand too cold at first, that being a principal impediment to its fermentation ; as soon as it hath done working, stop it up close, and after a month bottle it ; and the longer it is kept, the better it will be. By the floating of the egg you may judge of its strength, and you may make it more or less strong as you please, by adding of more honey, or more water; end by long boiling of it, it is made more pleasant and durable.

Cloves

Cloves (*Eugenia caryophyllata*) are the unopened buds of a tropical evergreen tree. They are picked when green and left to dry to black. The berries have a slight numbing effect and the flavour is menthol.

The earliest reference for cloves I found was in 1806 for Mr Bevan: Sale By Auction:¹⁷

... a quantity of cloves, which will be sold in small lots ...

¹⁴ Chutney, Abbott, 123 Edward 1864 *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well As The "Upper Ten Thousand"* Sampson Low, Son, and Marston p.

¹⁵ Charles Thompson, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 15 March 1807 p.1

¹⁶ Honey, The True Colonist Van Diemen's Land Political Dispatch and Agricultural and Commercial 25 March 1836 p.39

¹⁷ Mr Bevan: Sale By Auction, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 2 November 1806 p.2

The earliest recipe I found using cloves was this 1831 recipe for making Cherry Brandy.¹⁸

On 4lbs. of cherries stoned, with the kernels, pour 4 quarts of brandy ; let the mixture stand ten days in a vessel closely covered ; then strain it through muslin, and adding 2lbs. of fine white sugar boiled to a syrup, cork up the whole in clean dry bottles ; in two months it will be fit for use. Flavour, according to taste, with cinnamon, mace, cloves, orange flowers, or rose leaves.

Coriander

Both the leaves and seeds of Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) are used. The former is used in curries and related dishes. The latter is used in both sweet and savoury dishes.

The earliest reference for coriander I found was this 1821 advertisement for J. Tawell, Apothecary:¹⁹

... English caraway and coriander seed ...

An early recipe for using coriander was this from 1859 for Damson Wine:²⁰

Gather the fruit dry, weigh them and bruise them with the hand; upon every 8 lbs. of fruit pour a gallon of boiling water, afterwards let it stand 2 days; then draw it off into a clean cask and to every gallon of liquor add 2 lbs. of sugar. Let it ferment, keeping the cask quite full that the wine may clear itself; when the fermentation is apparently over, bung the cask tight, the longer it is now kept before being bottled the better, and when bottled it will be better to put a lump of sugar into each bottle. You may boil in the water in the first instance a little approved spice together with an ounce of coriander-seed bruised to each gallon of wine. Some persons prefer to ferment the wine with yeast in a tub previous to committing it to the cask.

Cumin

Cumin (*Cuminum cyminum*) are seeds that can be mistaken for fennel. They haven't quite the sweetness of fennel but do enhance a curry. The flavour profile is pungent, earthy, slightly bitter, and makes one think predominately of curry.

The earliest reference I found for cumin was this advertisement in 1826 for H. Mace, Chemist and Druggist:²¹

... cardamom, caraway,, coriander, cumin, and lin seeds ...

An early recipe I found using cumin was this in 1876 for Curry:²²

This is a tried family recipe: 6oz. turmeric 3oz. coriander seed, 1oz. cummin seed, 1oz. white pepper, 1oz. fenugreek, 1oz. caraway seed, ½ oz. cayenne, ¼ oz. ginger. Grind to a fine powder, and keep in a tightly-stoppered bottle.

¹⁸ To make cherry brandy, Losses and Wants, *The Australian* 12 August 1831 p.4

¹⁹ J. Tawell, Apothecary, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 7 August 1830 p.2

²⁰ Damson Wine, Drinks for Teetotallers, *The Australian Home Companion and Band of Hope Journal* 2 July 1959 p.255

²¹ H. Mace, Chemist and Druggist, *The Australian* 19 April 1826 p.1

²² Curry Powder, *The Albury Banner And The Wodonga Express* 10 June 1876 p. 18

Curry Powder

Basically a collection of other ground spices with turmeric sometimes being overwhelming.

The earliest reference for curry powder was this from 1813:²³

A few cannisters of lately imported Curry Powder, in high preservation, on Sale by J. Laurie, 18, Hunter-street. Price £1 5s. per Cannister, with directions for use ...

The earliest recipe for Curry Powder I found was this 1835 Warren Hastings' Receipt for Curry:²⁴

Take a quarter of a pound of butter and fry the heart of a hard white cabbage and two large onions, sliced with an apple or any other acid fruit, then put them into a stewpan with a teaspoonful of good cayenne pepper, one of ground black pepper, and one of salt, a table-spoonful of turmeric, the juice of half a lemon, and a little good gravy ; then put in the fowl or meat, after it is cut up and fried and let it simmer over a gentle fire for three hours.

Fenugreek

Fenugreek seeds (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) are quite pungent but when roasted for a curry get a burnt sugar and maple syrup taste, says Hemphill. They are an essential ingredient of Sri Lankan curries.

The earliest reference to fenugreek was in 1824 in an advertisement for J. Tawell:²⁵

... dispente, fenugreek, turmeric ...

The earliest recipe using fenugreek I found was this 1873 one for *Madras Curry Powder As Made In India*:²⁶

Eight ozs. cummin seed bruised, 8 oz .coriander seed, braised, shelled, roasted, and ground like coffee ; 8 ozs. ground black pepper, ground fine ; 8 ozs tumeric, ground very fine ; 4 ozs. fresh cayenne pepper ; 6 ozs. fenugreek seed, ground. Mix and rub well together in a very large Wedgwood mortar. When cooking add the usual flavoring ingredients of onions eschalots, garlic, &c, as in all the curries described.

Garlic

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) is such a part of many cuisines it almost feels unnecessary to describe it here. Perhaps the most pungent of the spices. So pungent that for years home cooks were told to rub a clove around the bowl in which the salad was to be made and not be an ingredient in the salad.

The earliest reference to garlic I found was this advertisement of goods for sale from G. W. Eldridge:²⁷

...tincture, garlic, gentian...

²³ Curry Powder, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 4 December 1813 p.2

²⁴ Warren Hastings' Receipt for Curry, Extracts *The Sydney Herald* 27 August 1835 p.3

²⁵ J. Tawell, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 13 May 1824 p.4

²⁶ Madras Curry Powder As Made In India, *South Australian Chronological and Weekly Mail*, 9 March 1873 p.3

²⁷ G. W. Eldridge, *The Tasmanian* 17 August 1832

The earliest recipe using garlic I found was 1846 as an ingredient in curing ham:²⁸

The ham is cured in a brine of salt, saltpetre, and aromatic herbs, namely, a few bay leaves, wild thyme, a handful of juniper berries, and a little garlic. It is steeped for about six weeks, and then dried in the smoke of the chimney over a wood fire. When wanted for dressing, it is buried in the ground for twenty-four hours, and then boiled, with the addition of the same aromatic herbs in the water. After boiling; the bone is taken out and the ham is pressed under a heavy weight.

Ginger

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) is a root more properly referred to as a rhizome. Ginger rhizomes would generally be described as having a sweet, pungent aroma and lemony freshness. Its flavour can vary from tangy sweet and spicy.

An early reference for ginger I found was in this 1816 advertisement for goods for sale by Mr. Bevan:²⁹

... Rice in Bags, Pepper and Ginger ...

An early recipe using ginger was for this 1828 recipe for Ginger Beer:³⁰

Get a gallon of fine soft water, and put into it about 2 lb. of the best refined lump sugar ; a couple of fresh lemons finely sliced ; two ounces of the best fresh powdered ginger; and a dessert spoonful of cream of tartar. Let these simmer over the fire for half an hour, taking care not to let them boil. Then add a tablespoonful of yeast, ferment it in the usual way, and bottle it for use. You will thus have a gallon of excellent and wholesome beer, which will strengthen the stomach, dispel wind in the bowels, and give new life to the constitution.

Mace

Mace is the dried skin of the nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans houtt*). The flavour profile is similar to a nutmeg, but more delicate and ideal for shellfish and all seafood.

The earliest reference for mace was in an 1813 advertisement for goods being sold by Mr Crooks.³¹

... pepper, ginger, mace ...

This is an 1843 recipe for Fish Sauce Without Butter:³²

Simmer very gently a quarter pint of vinegar, and half a pint of soft water, with an onion, a little horseradish, and the following spices lightly bruised: four cloves, two blades of mace, and half a teaspoonful of black pepper; when the onion is quite tender, chop it small with two anchovies, and set the whole to boil for a few minutes with a spoonful of ketchup. Beat the yolks of three fresh eggs, strain them, mix the liquor by degrees with them; and when well set

²⁸ A Land of Fatness, *Launceston Advertiser*, 15 January 1846 p.4

²⁹ Same Day - By Mr. Bevan, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*

³⁰ Ginger Beer, Domestic Economy, *Colonial Advocate and Tasmanian Monthly Review and Register* 1 April 2 1828 p.30

³¹ For Sale Crooks Warehouse, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 28 August 1813 p.2

³² Beef A La Mode, Mason, Edmund, *The Housewife's Guide*

the saucepan over a gentle fire keeping a basin in one hand into which to toss and turn the sauce to and fro, shake the saucepan over the fire, that the eggs may not curdle. Do not boil them; only let the sauce be hot enough to give it the thickness of melted butter.

Nutmeg

Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans houtt*) is a tough nut which is often grated or thinly flaked. It's sweet flavour leads to it being used in a range of dishes from sweet to savoury.

The earliest reference to nutmeg was in this 1808 advertisement of goods for sale by Mr. Nichols:³³

... ginger, cloves, nutmegs, and cinnamon ...

This 1843 recipe used nutmeg in a sauce for *Rabbits*.³⁴

Truss the rabbit close, with their heads straight up, the forelegs brought down, and the hind legs straight. Boil then three quarters of an hour if large ones; 15 will do for very small ones, lay them on a dish, and smother them with onion sauce; or make sauce for them as follows: boil the liver and bruise it very fine with a spoon, take out all the strings, put to it some good veal broth, a little parsley chopped fine, and some barberries picked clean from the stalks: season it with mace and nutmeg; thicken it with a piece of butter rolled in flour; let the sauce be of a good thickness and pour it over the rabbit. Garnish with lemon and barberries; some like only the liver and parsley chopped fine and put into melted butter.

Mustard

There are three varieties of mustard used in cooking yellow (*Brassica alba*), black mustard (*B. nigra*) and brown mustard (*B. juncea*). The heat of a fully developed mustard is sharp, irritating and biting hot.

The earliest reference to mustard I found was in 1803 for goods for sale by Capt. Parkes:³⁵

... Mustard, Pepper and Spices...

A recipe using mustard is this 1843 one for *Cow Heels*.³⁶

Boil them four hours, or till quite tender and serve them up with melted butter, and mustard, and vinegar. Or cut them in four parts and dip them in batter and fry them brown; fry onions if you like the and serve round; send melted butter or gravy in a boat.

Turmeric

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa* and *Curcuma domestica*) is most often associated with curries. It is also used in chermoula. A yellow rice dish is made from it also.

³³ Capital Investment *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 26 June 1808 p.1

³⁴ Rabbit, Mason, Edmund, *The Housewife's Guide*

³⁵ Capt. Parkes, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 17 April 1803 p.3

³⁶ Stubble Goose, Mason, Edmund, *The Housewife's Guide*

The earliest reference to turmeric was in the 1824 advertisement for J. Tawell:³⁷

... fenugreek, turmeric, aniseeds ...

The earliest recipe using turmeric was Warren Hastings 1835 *Receipt for Curry* as given above.

Sign off

This has been a brief look at spices used at the early days of the multiculinary Australian table. The range throws further doubt that the colonial table was as bland as is often ascribed.

³⁷ J. Tawell, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 13 May 1824 p.4